

4121, a bill to amend title 49, United States Code, to require the Secretary of Transportation to establish a motor vehicle recall assistance program, and for other purposes.

S. 4475

At the request of Ms. SINEMA, the name of the Senator from Arizona (Mr. KELLY) was added as a cosponsor of S. 4475, a bill to authorize the Secretary of the Interior to convey certain land to La Paz County, Arizona, and for other purposes.

S. 4659

At the request of Mr. REED, his name was added as a cosponsor of S. 4659, a bill to require a determination as to whether crimes committed against the Rohingya in Burma amount to genocide.

S. 5019

At the request of Mr. DAINES, the name of the Senator from New Mexico (Mr. HEINRICH) was added as a cosponsor of S. 5019, a bill to amend the Internal Revenue Code of 1986 to limit the charitable deduction for certain qualified conservation contributions.

STATEMENTS ON INTRODUCED BILLS AND JOINT RESOLUTIONS

By Mr. REED (for himself and Mr. TESTER):

S. 5072. A bill to improve Vet Centers for the Department of Veterans Affairs, and for other purposes; to the Committee on Veterans' Affairs.

Mr. REED. Mr. President, as many of my colleagues know, the transition from deployment to civilian life is frequently difficult. Vet Centers, created in the wake of the Vietnam War, are community-based centers that were designed to provide critical services for veterans, service members, and their families. Today, there is a need to enhance these Centers to realize that original vision—which is why I am introducing the Vet Center Improvement Act.

This legislation is an outgrowth of a Government Accountability Office (GAO) investigation that Senator TESTER and I requested into allegations that changes to performance metrics at Vet Centers may have negatively impacted care and additional concerns that he and I had about their staffing practices. The subsequent GAO report concluded that recent changes “have the potential to negatively affect care and create undue burden and stress on counselors providing that care at some Vet Centers.” This report included recommendations to improve care, transparency, and hiring and staffing methods that form the foundation for our legislation.

Specifically, the Vet Center Improvement Act requires periodic review and reform of performance standards at Vet Centers; the creation and periodic reevaluation of a staffing model, along with standardization of position descriptions and responsibilities across Vet Centers; the creation of a working

group to implement changes to improve quality of care for veterans and recruitment and retention of staff; and the GAO to review Vet Center infrastructure and examine what future investments are needed.

Additionally, our legislation creates a pilot program to provide grants to combat food insecurity and provide necessary heating and cooling assistance to veterans and their families. Food insecurity and the need for heating assistance are growing issues for veterans and others as a result of the pandemic.

I would like to thank Senator TESTER for not only the attention he has paid to this issue as Ranking Member of the Senate Veterans Affairs Committee, but also for joining with me on this important legislation. Our legislation has received support from such organizations as the Veterans of Foreign Wars (VFW), American Veterans (AMVETS), Disabled American Veterans (DAV), National Community Action Foundation (NCAF), National Association for State Community Services Programs (NASCS), the National Energy & Utility Affordability Coalition (NEUAC), and the URI Feinstein Center for a Hunger Free America. I look forward to continuing our partnership on this and other measures to improve care for our veterans, and I hope our colleagues will join us in this endeavor.

AMENDMENTS SUBMITTED AND PROPOSED

SA 2719. Mr. GARDNER (for Mr. LANKFORD) proposed an amendment to the resolution S. Res. 458, calling for the global repeal of blasphemy, heresy, and apostasy laws.

SA 2720. Mr. GARDNER (for Mr. LANKFORD) proposed an amendment to the resolution S. Res. 458, supra.

TEXT OF AMENDMENTS

SA 2719. Mr. GARDNER (for Mr. LANKFORD) proposed an amendment to the resolution S. Res. 458, calling for the global repeal of blasphemy, heresy, and apostasy laws; as follows:

Strike all after the resolving clause and insert the following: “That the Senate—

(1) recognizes that blasphemy, heresy, and apostasy laws inappropriately position governments as arbiters of religious truth and empower officials to impose religious dogma on individuals or minorities through the power of the government or through violence sanctioned by the government;

(2) calls on the President and the Secretary of State to encourage the repeal of blasphemy, heresy, and apostasy in bilateral discussions between the United States and all countries that have such laws, through direct interventions in bilateral and multilateral fora;

(3) encourages the President and the Secretary of State to oppose—

(A) any efforts, by the United Nations or by other international or multilateral fora, to create an international anti-blasphemy norm, such as the “defamation of religions” resolutions introduced in the United Nations between 1999 and 2010; and

(B) any attempts to expand the international norm on incitement to include blasphemy or defamation of religions;

(4) supports efforts by the United Nations to combat intolerance, discrimination, or violence against persons based on religion or belief without restricting expression, including United Nations Human Rights Council Resolution 16/18 (2011) and the Istanbul Process meetings pursuant to such resolution, that are consistent with the First Amendment to the Constitution;

(5) calls on the President and the Secretary of State to designate countries that enforce blasphemy, heresy, or apostasy laws as “countries of particular concern for religious freedom” under section 402(b)(1)(A)(ii) of the International Religious Freedom Act of 1998 (22 U.S.C. 6442(b)(1)(A)(ii)) for engaging in or tolerating severe violations of religious freedom, as a result of the abuses flowing from the enforcement of such laws and from unpunished vigilante violence often generated by blasphemy allegations;

(6) urges the governments of countries that enforce blasphemy, heresy, or apostasy laws to allow for freedom of religion and expression and amend or repeal such laws, as they provide pretext and impunity for vigilante violence against religious minorities; and

(7) urges the governments of countries that have prosecuted, imprisoned, and persecuted people on charges of blasphemy, heresy, or apostasy to release such people unconditionally and, once released, to ensure their safety and that of their families.

SA 2720. Mr. GARDNER (for Mr. LANKFORD) proposed an amendment to the resolution S. Res. 458, calling for the global repeal of blasphemy, heresy, and apostasy laws; as follows:

Strike the preamble and insert the following:

Whereas Article 18 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights states that “[e]veryone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion; this right includes freedom to change his religion or belief, and freedom, either alone or in community with others and in public or private, to manifest his religion or belief in teaching, practice, worship and observance”;

Whereas many countries continue to have criminal blasphemy laws, and many punish people who engage in expression deemed by the government to be blasphemous, heretical, apostate, defamatory of religion, or insulting to religion or to religious symbols, figures, or feelings, and such punishment can include fines, imprisonment, and capital punishment including by beheading;

Whereas blasphemy laws have affected Christians, Muslims, Jews, Hindus, Baha’i, secularists, and many other groups, are inconsistent with international human rights standards because they establish and promote official religious orthodoxy and dogma over individual liberty, and often result in violations of the freedoms of religion, thought, and expression that are protected under international instruments, including Articles 18 and 19 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR);

Whereas the United Nations Human Rights Committee stated in General Comment 34 that “[p]rohibitions of displays of lack of respect for a religion or other belief system, including blasphemy laws, are incompatible with the [ICCPR].”;

Whereas the United States Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF) has found that blasphemy charges are often based on false accusations, are used for sectarian or political purposes, and foster religious intolerance, discrimination, and violence;

Whereas USCIRF has found that at least 84 countries had blasphemy laws as of 2020;